



Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom

By Jane Hartselle

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Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom is “budding” all across Alabama. This program enables school children in Mobile, Montgomery, Tallapoosa, and Washington Counties to get a close-up look at private forestland and private forest landowners, as well as the many TREASURES that the forest holds.

The Alabama TREASURE Forest Association and Jane Hartselle, Mobile County Extension Agent with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System have teamed up with other agencies and community leaders to bring *Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom* to fifth grade school children across the state.

Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom was created to communicate the role private lands and private landowners play in environmentally and economically benefiting all of the people in Alabama.

The emphasis of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association is to promote wise management of all of our forest resources and to educate the general public on the importance of private land ownership and private landowners. *Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom* serves as a vehicle to expose school age children to the TREASURE Forest philosophy of managing our forests for a variety of resources in a way that sustains productivity for future generations.

Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom has two goals. The first goal

is to educate fifth grade students and their teachers about multiple-use management of our forest resources and how important private landowners are in the management of these valuable resources. The second goal is to involve private landowners and stakeholders in the education of our youth, other landowners, and the general public about the importance of our natural resources.

Volunteer Resource Development Team members are recruited and then invited to participate in three two-hour development sessions. Each team member receives a Teaching Resource Kit complete with lesson plans, activity sheets, and most importantly, an opportunity to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with fifth-grade students in the county.

The Volunteer Resource Development Teams are comprised of three people: 1) Resource Provider, 2) Stakeholder, and 3) Private Land Owner. Each team member brings the message of the TREASURE Forest program along with their own perspective, to encourage a feeling of pride and respect for the forestland in Alabama and a true sense of appreciation for the private landowner. The dynamics of this group fills a much-needed role in the education of our youth, as well as for the adults participating in this project. Often we take for granted the many benefits we receive each day from the forest.

Since November of 1999, the *Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom* program has continued to grow. In Mobile County alone, volunteers

have taken the *Forest in the Classroom* to 49 different elementary schools. This means that over 4,000 children in Mobile County were introduced to the many life-long lessons of the forest.

These same Volunteer Resource Development Teams took 32 different schools to the *Classroom in the Forest*. To ensure the success of each of the forest field trips, twelve private landowners opened their TREASURE Forests to over 900 children in Mobile County. With these tours, the idea of “Neighbors Helping Neighbors” was never more clearly demonstrated. School children were treated to hayrides, nature walks, and learning activities, as well as an “old fashion” lunch on the grounds. Not only the children, but also the adults had a great time.

Thanks to the many volunteers and “Team TREASURE Forest” of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association, the success of *Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom* is spreading across the state. Montgomery County is in its second year of the program where it has already had impact on many school children. Also in Tallapoosa and Washington Counties, the first year of the project is off and running. Stay tuned for an update of the progress in these counties.

We would love to bring this important message to your county. For more information and an opportunity to get involved, please contact one of the following:

- Jane Hartselle,
Alabama Cooperative Extension,
Tele: (251) 574-8445

- Alabama TREASURE Forest
Association,
Tele: (251) 442-2425

- Private Forest Management Team,
School of Forestry and Wildlife
Sciences, Auburn University
Tele: (334) 844-1043

Or your county’s:

- Alabama Forestry Commission office,
- Cooperative Extension office,
- Soil Conservation District office

or

- Alabama Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources. ☎